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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: PM VISITS SOUTH AFRICA DESPITE TROUBLE AT HOME

REF: A) MASERU 367; B) MASERU 353 AND PREVIOUS

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1. (U) SUMMARY: On June 18-20, the Prime Minister of Lesotho, Phakalitha Mosisili, conducted an official visit to Cape Town, South Africa. An official communique on the visit mentioned the signing of agreements on several bilateral issues, including the cross-border movement of citizens. In his public addresses, Mosisili stressed Lesotho and South Africa's shared history, the necessity of cooperation between the two countries on issues of economic development, and the revitalization of the Joint Bilateral Commission for Cooperation (JBCC). The communique also acknowledged that Mosisili had briefed SA President Mbeki on recent domestic political problems in Lesotho. However, this visit will be most remembered for the Prime Minister's conspicuous absence from his homeland during a time of strife and tension. END SUMMARY.

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Official Visit at a Troubled Time  
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2. (U) Phakalitha Mosisili, Lesotho's Prime Minister, conducted an official visit to the Republic of South Africa on June 18-20. On his trip to Cape Town, Mosisili was accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Mhlabi Tsekoa, Minister of Tourism, Environment; and Culture Lebohang Ntsinyi; Minister of Trade and Industry Popane Lebesa; and Minister of Finance and Development Planning Dr. Timothy Thahane. At home in Maseru, Lesotho's police had announced a curfew in light of recent attacks on the residences of senior GOL officials (ref A). At several points during his visit, members of the South African press queried Mosisili concerning rapidly unfolding events in the Mountain Kingdom.

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Addresses to State Banquet  
and the Business Community  
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13. (U) Prime Minister Mosisili formally addressed a state banquet hosted by President Mbeki on June 19 and a business forum on June 20. During his address at the state banquet, Mosisili emphasized the shared history and cultural heritage of the two nations. He referred to the need to further coordinate Lesotho and South Africa's foreign policy positions in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the African Union (AU). Noting that South Africa "can ill afford to co-exist with a poor, under-developed Lesotho within herself," he mentioned three joint economic goals for the two nations: 1) a more robust economic integration of Lesotho into South Africa; 2) increased trade between the two countries; and 3) direct South African investment in Lesotho's infrastructure in target areas such as tourism, manufacturing, roads, railway lines, electricity, and mining.

14. (U) The Prime Minister also spoke about the Lesotho-South Africa Joint Bilateral Commission for Cooperation (JBCC) and its 2001 goal to elevate Lesotho from the "Least Developed Country" category by 2006. According to Mosisili, the JBCC had had successes in the struggle against cross-border crime, study visas, and movement across borders, but had not achieved its overarching anti-poverty objectives because of the business community's lack of involvement. He called upon South Africa to keep its pledge to allow Lesotho to share in the economic benefits of South Africa's role as host of the 2010 World Cup.

15. (U) At the June 20 business forum, Prime Minister Mosisili stuck with many of the same themes. Referring to Lesotho and South Africa as "economically and socially intertwined," he recalled Lesotho's high growth rates in the mid-1990s as a model for the future. On the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), Mosisili stated that this "initiative of the United States of America" had "provided an auspicious boost to the

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hitherto nascent and struggling textile and garment industry" which "has now surpassed the Government as the largest employer in the country."

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The Official Communique  
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16. (U) Lesotho and South Africa issued an official communique on June 19 regarding the visit. Interestingly, the communique noted that the Prime Minister had briefed Mbeki on recent political developments in Lesotho and on the progress of the SADC Ministerial Troika dialogue aimed at resolving a political impasse in Lesotho. The communique referred to the signing of an agreement on the Facilitation of Cross Border Movement of Citizens, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Cooperation in Correctional Services, and an MOU on Cooperation on Cross Border Fires and other Forest Management Issues. The communique also stated that President Mbeki had reaffirmed South Africa's commitment to assist implementation of the Sani Pass Mokgotlong road project, predicted to yield benefits for tourism.

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Neighboring Summit, Bad Timing  
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17. (SBU) COMMENT: In the context of the overwhelming importance of the South Africa-Lesotho bilateral relationship to the Mountain Kingdom, regular high-level bilateral missions such as this one are quite necessary for Lesotho. On June 23, during an unrelated meeting with resident diplomats (ref A), Foreign Minister Tsekoa called the PM's visit a "fabulous success." However, this visit may be most remembered for the Prime Minister's conspicuous absence from his homeland during a time of strife and tension. Nonetheless, the one document signed during the trip which could have a near-term effect on Basotho citizens is the "Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross Border Movement of Citizens" which holds out the promise of greatly simplifying the border crossing regime between the two countries. However, no date has been set for the implementation of this initiative. END COMMENT.  
MURPHY